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FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/18/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [YM](#)  
SUBJECT: YEMEN'S RESTIVE SOUTH: IS SALEH (FINALLY) GETTING  
SERIOUS?

REF: A. SANAA 942  
[B](#). SANAA 950

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#). (S) SUMMARY. Although a nervous-seeming ROYG has employed numerous tactics to quell southern discontent in the weeks following Democracy Day (April 27), only recently did President Saleh hint at serious consideration of southern grievances. A May 17 public announcement of constitutional reform, a string of development initiatives in southern governorates and a meeting between presidential confidante and Northwest Regional Commander Major General Ali Muhsen al-Ahmar and southern supporter Sheikh Tariq al-Fadhli suggest that Saleh might now recognize the gravity of the southern issue. His follow-through on implementing the necessary reforms, however, remains a key question. END SUMMARY.

[2](#). (S) In the weeks leading up to Yemen's May 22 Unity Day celebrations, the ROYG has employed both sticks and carrots to dampen southern unrest: a crackdown on press freedom, arrests of key leaders, announcements of southern development projects and overtures from emissaries of President Saleh to either negotiate with or buy off key southerners (Ref A). However, until recently, Saleh avoided actions such as serious dialogue or political and economic reforms that would indicate his sincere intent to deal with southern discontent. Southern Movement leader General Mohamed Saleh Tammah told PolOff on May 17, "The President sent a delegation to (the Southern Movement's) meeting in Abyan, but we rejected them. They had no plan, they were just there to be there."

[3](#). (S) President Saleh used a May 17 meeting with tribal sheikhs from Yafa' (Lahj governorate) to signal a potential key switch in ROYG policy. According to press coverage of the meeting, Saleh pledged to usher in new constitutional amendments that would give local councils greater authority and permit the election of district mayors. In a meeting with PolOff on May 18, a British diplomat compared the current southern flare-ups to the fifth round of fighting in Sa'ada: as the international community worried about how to intervene to stop the escalating conflict, Saleh shocked everyone by declaring a sudden unilateral ceasefire in July [2008](#). Saleh could use an occasion such as Unity Day to make a similar announcement of major reforms to address southern grievances.

[4](#). (U) Further, the ROYG has announced a series of development initiatives in the southern governorates to the tune of 25 billion Yemeni rials (125 million USD). Vice President Abdurabu Mansour Hadi has announced development and services projects in Aden throughout mid-May. On May 18, Prime Minister Ali Mujawar announced that the first subsidies would finally be delivered to homeowners in Hadramout whose residences were destroyed in floods in October 2008.

¶5. (S) Press reports indicated that presidential confidante and Northwest Regional Commander Major General Ali Muhsen al-Ahmar met with Sheikh Tariq al-Fadhli in Abyan on May 16; despite various reports of a falling out, the two have very strong family ties and many skeptics believe they remain in close contact. (Note: Ali Muhsin is one of Saleh's closest advisors, and while his personal opinion on the southern issue remains a mystery, he has in the past used internal conflicts, such as the al-Houthi rebellion, to increase his personal power. End Note.)

COMMENT

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¶6. (S) President Saleh's most recent actions suggest that he now realizes that some concrete actions are needed if he is to defuse tensions in the south (Ref B). However, he excels as a crisis manager and might see the occasion of Unity Day as an opportunity to announce a new plan for bring the restive south back into the fold. Whether or not he and his inner circle have the political will to see through key reforms, however, remains to be seen. END COMMENT.

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